

LITHUANIA



KEY STATISTICS

The department of statistics (Statistics Lithuania) collects data on homelessness every 10 years within the framework of the general population census. In 2011, the census instructions defined homeless people as those who have no permanent place of residence and no money to rent or buy at least a basic lodging, and for this reason they live on the streets (ETHOS 1), in places not intended for human habitation, in institutions for temporary living (night shelters (ETHOS 2.1 and 3.1), crisis centres and shelters for mothers and children (ETHOS 4.1).

Statistics Lithuania (<http://osp.stat.gov.lt/>) recorded about 4024 homeless people in Lithuania over 2017. Of these:

- 2494 persons were living in shelters for homeless people (ETHOS 2.1 and 3.1);
- 1530 persons were living in crisis centres and shelters for mothers and children (ETHOS 4.1).

Urban areas usually have the highest rate of homelessness – the largest number of homeless people living in night shelters in 2017 was in the Kaunas district (the second biggest city) – 631. In the Vilnius district there were 463. 528 – the largest number of persons living in crisis centres and shelter for mothers and children in 2017 were in Vilnius district.

According to the Ministry of Social Security and Labour (<https://socmin.lrv.lt>) for April 2018 there were more than 11 000 persons/families waiting for social housing.

INCREASE/DECREASE IN NUMBER OF HOMELESS PEOPLE

Homelessness has been steadily increasing over the past decade. The number of residents in shelters for homeless people slightly decreased in 2017 – 2494 (annual prevalence) compared to 2016 – 2968. It reached the level of 2015 with 2487. A similar situation is observed with the number of people residing in crisis centres and shelters for

mothers and children: the number decreased from 1601 in 2015 to 1530 in 2017.

The number of households waiting for social housing decreased - from more than 32 000 in 2014 to 10449 households in 2017 (December) on the waiting list for social housing. This number decreased in 2016 after the list was revised and the duty to declare the assets and income was enforced. According to the head of the housing support department of the Ministry of Social Security and Labour, the average time people have to wait for social housing in the biggest cities (Vilnius and Kaunas) remains similar, at about 10-15 years.

CHANGE IN PROFILE OF HOMELESS PEOPLE

The number of homeless people residing in night shelters for more than 6 months in 2017 stayed similar as in 2016 (1054) – 1015. This number slightly varies year upon year but the trend that most homeless people stay in night shelters for more than 6 months remains.

There are no significant changes to the gender balance of the homeless population.

POLICIES & STRATEGIES

National Strategy

There is no specific integrated strategy for tackling homelessness in Lithuania. There is a housing strategy with goals that are indirectly linked to homelessness, such as the expansion of housing options to all social groups.

Vilnius has adopted a programme on homelessness for the period of 2013-2018, covering accommodation and reintegration. It is planned that the new programme will be adopted for the next period.

In 2015 the action plan for the development/expansion of the social housing pool for 2015-2020 was approved. It is EU-funded.

Governance

The Ministry of Social Security and Labour has the main responsibility for issues relating to homelessness, as well as for coordinating governmental policies regarding state assistance for housing acquisition or rental. The Ministry of Social Security and Labour forms the housing support policy, organises, coordinates and controls its implementation, and assigns the funding for current social support programmes to the municipalities. The municipalities provide individuals and families with social housing or partial compensation of taxes related to the rent of housing. Local authorities are responsible for ensuring the provision of social services. Under the Constitution, the municipalities are autonomous in respect of the development of local policy, hence there are regional disparities in the quality of social services and the infrastructure of services.

There is no specific budget for homelessness interventions. For the period of 2014 – 2020 58,7 million euros were foreseen for the projects of the expansion of social housing, of which 49.9 million via the European Regional Development Fund and 8.8 million via municipalities resources. Ministry of Social security and labour is planning to allocate 3,166 million euros for housing support in 2019. Funds allocated to housing programmes and housing policy implementation agencies are managed by the Ministry of Finance. Social services are financed by municipal funds, specific grants are allocated to municipalities, and personal contributions are paid for social services.

REMARKS ON KEY POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

Positive

The law permitting municipalities to rent housing from private or legal persons and sublease it for people in need will come into force from the January 2019 in order to expand the social housing pool and provide social housing for more people by using fewer financial resources.

Negative

There is a lack of systematic and concerted action to combat and prevent homelessness as a specific social issue.

Since 2015, individuals and families waiting for social housing may rent housing from private individuals and make use of the compensation of taxes related to rent and lease-purchase of housing. However, this form of state support is seldom used: in 2015, rent compensation was used by only 0.3 percent, and in 2016 – 6.8 percent of individuals and families expected to make use of such support (www.vkontrola.it). According to the Ministry of social affairs, in April 2018 only 256 persons got the support for housing rental. One of the reasons is that most of the housing is rented 'illegally'. The landlords avoid registering contracts of rental in Centre of Registers.

Little action is taken to prevent homelessness.